



## TO THE READER.

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# POEMS



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# POEMS

BY

RALPH HODGSON

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED  
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1930

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*First Edition May 1917*

*Reprinted June, July, and September 1917, 1918, 1920,  
1923, 1930.*

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN  
BY R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, EDINBURGH.

**TO**  
**MY MOTHER**



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## THE GIPSY GIRL

“COME, try your skill, kind gentlemen,  
A penny for three tries !”  
Some threw and lost, some threw  
and won  
A ten-a-penny prize.

She was a tawny gipsy girl,  
A girl of twenty years,  
I liked her for the lumps of gold  
That jingled from her ears ;

I liked the flaring yellow scarf  
Bound loose about her throat,  
I liked her showy purple gown  
And flashy velvet coat.

## THE GIPSY GIRL

A man came up, too loose of tongue,  
And said no good to her ;  
She did not blush as Saxons do,  
Or turn upon the cur ;

She fawned and whined “Sweet  
gentleman,  
A penny for three tries !”  
—But oh, the den of wild things in  
The darkness of her eyes !

## A SONG

WITH Love among the haycocks  
We played at hide and seek ;

He shut his eyes and counted—  
We hid among the hay—  
Then he a haycock mounted,  
And spied us where we lay ;

And O ! the merry laughter  
Across the hayfield after !

## TIME, YOU OLD GIPSY MAN

TIME, you old gipsy man,  
Will you not stay,  
Put up your caravan  
Just for one day ?

All things I'll give you  
Will you be my guest,  
Bells for your jennet  
Of silver the best,  
Goldsmiths shall beat you  
A great golden ring,  
Peacocks shall bow to you,  
Little boys sing,  
Oh, and sweet girls will  
Festoon you with may,  
Time, you old gipsy,  
Why hasten away ?

## TIME

Last week in Babylon,  
Last night in Rome,  
Morning, and in the crush  
Under Paul's dome ;  
Under Paul's dial  
You tighten your rein—  
Only a moment,  
And off once again ;  
Off to some city  
Now blind in the womb,  
Off to another  
Ere that's in the tomb.

Time, you old gipsy man,  
Will you not stay,  
Put up your caravan  
Just for one day ?

## GHOUL CARE

SOUR fiend, go home and tell the Pit  
For once you met your master,—  
A man who carried in his soul  
Three charms against disaster,  
The Devil and disaster.

Away, away, and tell the tale  
And start your whelps a-whining,  
Say “In the greenwood of his soul  
A lizard’s eye was shining,  
A little eye kept shining.”

Away, away, and salve your sores,  
And set your hags a-groaning,  
Say “In the greenwood of his soul  
A drowsy bee was droning,  
A dreamy bee was droning.”

## GHOU L CARE

Prodigious Bat ! Go start the walls  
Of Hell with horror ringing,  
Say " In the greenwood of his soul  
There was a goldfinch singing,  
A pretty goldfinch singing."

And then come back, come, if you  
please,  
A fiercer ghoul and ghaster,  
With all the glooms and smuts of  
Hell  
Behind you, I'm your master !  
You know I'm still your master.

## EVE

EVE, with her basket, was  
Deep in the bells and grass  
Wading in bells and grass  
Up to her knees,  
Picking a dish of sweet  
Berries and plums to eat,  
Down in the bells and grass  
Under the trees.

Mute as a mouse in a  
Corner the cobra lay,  
Curled round a bough of the  
Cinnamon tall. . . .  
Now to get even and  
Humble proud heaven and  
Now was the moment or  
Never at all.

## EVE

“Eva!” Each syllable  
Light as a flower fell,  
“Eva!” he whispered the  
Wondering maid,  
Soft as a bubble sung  
Out of a linnet’s lung,  
Soft and most silverly  
“Eva!” he said.

Picture that orchard sprite,  
Eve, with her body white,  
Supple and smooth to her  
Slim finger tips,  
Wondering, listening,  
Listening, wondering,  
Eve with a berry  
Half-way to her lips.

Oh had our simple Eve  
Seen through the make-believe!  
Had she but known the  
Pretender he was!  
Out of the boughs he came,  
Whispering still her name,

## EVE

Tumbling in twenty rings  
Into the grass.

Here was the strangest pair  
In the world anywhere,  
Eve in the bells and grass  
Kneeling, and he  
Telling his story low. . .  
Singing birds saw them go  
Down the dark path to  
The Blasphemous Tree.

Oh what a clatter when  
Titmouse and Jenny Wren  
Saw him successful and  
Taking his leave!  
How the birds rated him,  
How they all hated him!  
How they all pitied  
Poor motherless Eve!

Picture her crying  
Outside in the lane,  
Eve, with no dish of sweet  
Berries and plums to eat,

## EVE

Haunting the gate of the  
Orchard in vain. . . .  
Picture the lewd delight  
Under the hill to-night—  
“Eva!” the toast goes round,  
“Eva!” again.

## THE SONG OF HONOUR

I CLIMBED a hill as light fell short,  
And rooks came home in scramble  
sort,  
And filled the trees and flapped and  
fought  
And sang themselves to sleep ;  
An owl from nowhere with no sound  
Swung by and soon was nowhere  
found,  
I heard him calling half-way round,  
Holloing loud and deep ;  
A pair of stars, faint pins of light,  
Then many a star, sailed into sight,  
And all the stars, the flower of night,

## THE SONG OF HONOUR

Were round me at a leap ;  
To tell how still the valleys lay  
I heard a watchdog miles away,  
And bells of distant sheep.

I heard no more of bird or bell,  
The mastiff in a slumber fell,  
I stared into the sky,  
As wondering men have always done  
Since beauty and the stars were  
    one,  
Though none so hard as I.

It seemed, so still the valleys were,  
As if the whole world knelt at  
    prayer,  
Save me and me alone ;  
So pure and wide that silence was 1 ✓  
I feared to bend a blade of grass,  
And there I stood like stone.

## THE SONG OF HONOUR

There, sharp and sudden, there I  
heard—

*Ah! some wild lovesick singing bird  
Woke singing in the trees?*

*The nightingale and babble-wren  
Were in the English greenwood  
then,*

*And you heard one of these?*

The babble-wren and nightingale  
Sang in the Abyssinian vale  
That season of the year!

Yet, true enough, I heard them plain,  
I heard them both again, again,  
As sharp and sweet and clear  
As if the Abyssinian tree  
Had thrust a bough across the sea,  
Had thrust a bough across to me  
With music for my ear!

## THE SONG OF HONOUR

I heard them both, and oh ! I heard  
The song of every singing bird  
That sings beneath the sky,  
And with the song of lark and wren  
The song of mountains, moths and  
men  
And seas and rainbows vie !

I heard the universal choir,  
The Sons of Light exalt their Sire |  
With universal song,  
Earth's lowliest and loudest notes,  
Her million times ten million throats  
Exalt Him loud and long,  
And lips and lungs and tongues of  
Grace  
From every part and every place  
Within the shining of His face,  
The universal throng.

## THE SONG OF HONOUR

I heard the hymn of being sound  
From every well of honour found  
In human sense and soul :  
The song of poets when they write  
The testament of Beautysprite  
Upon a flying scroll,  
The song of painters when they  
    take  
A burning brush for Beauty's sake  
And limn her features whole—

The song of men divinely wise  
Who look and see in starry skies  
Not stars so much as robins' eyes,  
And when these pale away  
Hear flocks of shiny pleiades  
Among the plums and apple trees  
Sing in the summer day—

## THE SONG OF HONOUR

The song of all both high and low  
To some blest vision true,  
The song of beggars when they throw  
The crust of pity all men owe  
To hungry sparrows in the snow,  
Old beggars hungry too—  
The song of kings of kingdoms when  
They rise above their fortune Men,  
And crown themselves anew—

The song of courage, heart and will  
And gladness in a fight,  
Of men who face a hopeless hill  
With sparking and delight,  
The bells and bells of song that ring  
Round banners of a cause or king  
From armies bleeding white—

## THE SONG OF HONOUR

The song of sailors every one  
When monstrous tide and tempest  
run  
At ships like bulls at red,  
When stately ships are twirled and  
spun  
Like whipping tops and help there's  
none  
And mighty ships ten thousand ton  
Go down like lumps of lead—

And song of fighters stern as they  
At odds with fortune night and  
day,  
Crammed up in cities grim and  
grey  
As thick as bees in hives,  
Hosannas of a lowly throng  
Who sing unconscious of their song,  
Whose lips are in their lives—

## THE SONG OF HONOUR

And song of some at holy war  
With spells and ghouls more dread  
by far  
Than deadly seas and cities are  
Or hordes of quarrelling kings—  
The song of fighters great and small.  
The song of pretty fighters all  
And high heroic things—

The song of lovers—who knows how  
Twitched up from place and time  
Upon a sigh, a blush, a vow,  
A curve or hue of cheek or brow,  
Borne up and off from here and now  
Into the void sublime !

And crying loves and passions still  
In every key from soft to shrill  
And numbers never done,  
Dog-loyalties to faith and friend,  
And loves like Ruth's of old no end,  
And intermission none—

## THE SONG OF HONOUR

And burst on burst for beauty and  
For numbers not behind,  
From men whose love of motherland  
Is like a dog's for one dear hand,  
Sole, selfless, boundless, blind—  
And song of some with hearts beside  
For men and sorrows far and wide,  
Who watch the world with pity and  
pride  
And warm to all mankind—

And endless joyous music rise  
From children at their play,  
And endless soaring lullabies  
From happy, happy mothers' eyes,  
And answering crows and baby-cries,  
How many who shall say !  
And many a song as wondrous well  
With pangs and sweets intolerable  
From lonely hearths too grey to tell,  
God knows how utter grey !  
And song from many a house of care  
When pain has forced a footing there  
And there's a Darkness on the stair  
Will not be turned away—

## THE SONG OF HONOUR

And song—that song whose singers  
come

With old kind tales of pity from  
The Great Compassion's lips,  
That make the bells of Heaven to  
peal

Round pillows frosty with the feel  
Of Death's cold finger tips—

The song of men all sorts and kinds,  
As many tempers, moods and minds  
As leaves are on a tree,  
As many faiths and castes and creeds,  
As many human bloods and breeds  
As in the world may be ;

The song of each and all who gaze  
On Beauty in her naked blaze,  
Or see her dimly in a haze,  
Or get her light in fitful rays  
And tiniest needles even,  
The song of all not wholly dark,  
Not wholly sunk in stupor stark  
Too deep for groping Heaven—

## THE SONG OF HONOUR

And alleluias sweet and clear  
And wild with beauty men mishear,  
From choirs of song as near and dear  
To Paradise as they,  
The everlasting pipe and flute  
Of wind and sea and bird and brute,  
And lips deaf men imagine mute  
In wood and stone and clay :

The music of a lion strong  
That shakes a hill a whole night  
long,  
A hill as loud as he,  
The twitter of a mouse among  
Melodious greenery,  
The ruby's and the rainbow's song,  
The nightingale's—all three,  
The song of life that wells and flows  
From every leopard, lark and rose  
And everything that gleams or goes  
Lack-lustre in the sea.

## THE SONG OF HONOUR

I heard it all, each, every note  
Of every lung and tongue and throat,  
Ay, every rhythm and rhyme  
Of everything that lives and loves  
And upward, ever upward moves  
From lowly to sublime !  
Earth's multitudinous Sons of Light,  
I heard them lift their lyric might  
With each and every chanting sprite  
That lit the sky that wondrous night  
As far as eye could climb !

I heard it all, I heard the whole  
Harmonious hymn of being roll  
Up through the chapel of my soul ✓  
And at the altar die,  
And in the awful quiet then  
Myself I heard, Amen, Amen,  
Amen I heard me cry !  
I heard it all and then although  
I caught my flying senses, Oh,  
A dizzy man was I !  
I stood and stared ; the sky was lit,  
The sky was stars all over it,

## THE SONG OF HONOUR

I stood, I knew not why,  
Without a wish, without a will,  
I stood upon that silent hill  
And stared into the sky until  
My eyes were blind with stars and  
still  
I stared into the sky.

## THE MYSTERY

✓ HE came and took me by the hand  
Up to a red rose tree,  
He kept His meaning to Himself  
But gave a rose to me.

I did not pray Him to lay bare  
The mystery to me,  
Enough the rose was Heaven to  
smell,  
And His own face to see.

## STUPIDITY STREET

✓ I SAW with open eyes  
Singing birds sweet  
Sold in the shops  
For the people to eat,  
Sold in the shops of  
Stupidity Street.

I saw in vision  
The worm in the wheat,  
And in the shops nothing  
For people to eat ;  
Nothing for sale in  
Stupidity Street.

## THE BELLS OF HEAVEN

'TWOULD ring the bells of Heaven  
The wildest peal for years,  
If Parson lost his senses  
And people came to theirs,  
And he and they together  
Knelt down with angry prayers  
For tamed and shabby tigers  
And dancing dogs and bears,  
And wretched, blind pit ponies,  
And little hunted hares.

## THE JOURNEYMAN

Not baser than his own homekeeping  
kind

Whose journeyman he is—

Blind sons and breastless daughters  
of the blind

Whose darkness pardons his,—

About the world, while all the world  
approves,

The pimp of Fashion steals,

With all the angels mourning their  
dead loves

Behind his bloody heels.

It may be late when Nature cries  
Enough!

As one day cry she will,

And man may have the wit to put  
her off

With shifts a season still;

## THE JOURNEYMAN

But man may find the pinch im-  
portunate

And fall to blaming men—

Blind sires and breastless mothers of  
his fate,

It may be late and may be very late,  
Too late for blaming then.

## THE BULL

SEE an old unhappy bull,  
Sick in soul and body both,  
Slouching in the undergrowth  
Of the forest beautiful,  
Banished from the herd he led,  
Bulls and cows a thousand head.

Cranes and gaudy parrots go  
Up and down the burning sky ;  
Tree-top cats purr drowsily  
In the dim-day green below ;  
And troops of monkeys, nutting,  
some,  
All disputing, go and come ;

## THE BULL

And things abominable sit  
Picking offal buck or swine,  
On the mess and over it  
Burnished flies and beetles shine,  
And spiders big as bladders lie  
Under hemlocks ten foot high ;

And a dotted serpent curled  
Round and round and round a tree,  
Yellowing its greenery,  
Keeps a watch on all the world,  
All the world and this old bull  
In the forest beautiful.

Bravely by his fall he came :  
One he led, a bull of blood  
Newly come to lustihood,  
Fought and put his prince to shame,  
Snuffed and pawed the prostrate head  
Tameless even while it bled.

## THE BULL

There they left him, every one,  
Left him there without a lick,  
Left him for the birds to pick,  
Left him there for carrion,  
Vilely from their bosom cast  
Wisdom, worth and love at last.

When the lion left his lair  
And roared his beauty through the  
hills,  
And the vultures pecked their quills  
And flew into the middle air,  
Then this prince no more to reign  
Came to life and lived again.

He snuffed the herd in far retreat,  
He saw the blood upon the ground,  
And snuffed the burning airs around  
Still with beevish odours sweet,  
While the blood ran down his head  
And his mouth ran slaver red.

## THE BULL

Pity him, this fallen chief,  
All his splendour, all his strength,  
All his body's breadth and length  
Dwindled down with shame and  
    grief,  
Half the bull he was before,  
Bones and leather, nothing more.

See him standing dewlap-deep  
In the rushes at the lake,  
Surly, stupid, half asleep,  
Waiting for his heart to break  
And the birds to join the flies  
Feasting at his bloodshot eyes ;

Standing with his head hung down  
In a stupor, dreaming things :  
Green savannas, jungles brown,  
Battlefields and bellowings,  
Bulls undone and lions dead  
And vultures flapping overhead.

## THE BULL

Dreaming things : of days he spent  
With his mother gaunt and lean  
In the valley warm and green,  
Full of baby wonderment,  
Blinking out of silly eyes  
At a hundred mysteries ;

Dreaming over once again  
How he wandered with a throng  
Of bulls and cows a thousand strong,  
Wandered on from plain to plain,  
Up the hill and down the dale,  
Always at his mother's tail ;

How he lagged behind the herd,  
Lagged and tottered, weak of limb,  
And she turned and ran to him  
Blaring at the loathly bird  
Stationed always in the skies,  
Waiting for the flesh that dies.

## THE BULL

Dreaming maybe of a day  
When her drained and drying paps  
Turned him to the sweets and saps,  
Richer fountains by the way,  
And she left the bull she bore  
And he looked to her no more ;

And his little frame grew stout,  
And his little legs grew strong,  
And the way was not so long ;  
And his little horns came out,  
And he played at butting trees  
And boulder-stones and tortoises,

Joined a game of knobby skulls  
With the youngsters of his year,  
All the other little bulls,  
Learning both to bruise and bear,  
Learning how to stand a shock  
Like a little bull of rock.

## THE BULL

Dreaming of a day less dim,  
Dreaming of a time less far,  
When the faint but certain star  
Of destiny burned clear for him,  
And a fierce and wild unrest  
Broke the quiet of his breast,

And the gristles of his youth  
Hardened in his comely pow,  
And he came to fighting growth,  
Beat his bull and won his cow,  
And flew his tail and trampled off  
Past the tallest, vain enough,

And curved about in splendour full  
And curved again and snuffed the airs  
As who should say Come out who  
dares !

And all beheld a bull, a Bull,  
And knew that here was surely one  
That backed for no bull, fearing none.

## THE BULL

And the leader of the herd  
Looked and saw, and beat the ground,  
And shook the forest with his sound,  
Bellowed at the loathly bird  
Stationed always in the skies,  
Waiting for the flesh that dies.

Dreaming, this old bull forlorn,  
Surely dreaming of the hour  
When he came to sultan power,  
And they owned him master-horn,  
Chiefest bull of all among  
Bulls and cows a thousand strong ;

And in all the tramping herd  
Not a bull that barred his way,  
Not a cow that said him nay,  
Not a bull or cow that erred  
In the furnace of his look  
Dared a second, worse rebuke ;

## THE BULL

Not in all the forest wide,  
Jungle, thicket, pasture, fen,  
Not another dared him then,  
Dared him and again defied ;  
Not a sovereign buck or boar  
Came a second time for more ;

Not a serpent that survived  
Once the terrors of his hoof  
Risked a second time reproof,  
Came a second time and lived,  
Not a serpent in its skin  
Came again for discipline ;

Not a leopard bright as flame,  
Flashing fingerhooks of steel  
That a wooden tree might feel,  
Met his fury once and came  
For a second reprimand,  
Not a leopard in the land ;

## THE BULL

Not a lion of them all,  
Not a lion of the hills,  
Hero of a thousand kills,  
Dared a second fight and fall,  
Dared that ram terrific twice,  
Paid a second time the price.

Pity him, this dupe of dream,  
Leader of the herd again  
Only in his daft old brain,  
Once again the bull supreme  
And bull enough to bear the part  
Only in his tameless heart.

Pity him that he must wake ;  
Even now the swarm of flies  
Blackening his bloodshot eyes  
Bursts and blusters round the lake,  
Scattered from the feast half-fed,  
By great shadows overhead ;

## THE BULL

And the dreamer turns away  
From his visionary herds  
And his splendid yesterday,  
Turns to meet the loathly birds  
Flocking round him from the skies,  
Waiting for the flesh that dies.

## PLAYMATES

It's sixty years ago, the people say :  
Two village children, neighbours born  
and bred,  
One morning played beneath a rotten  
tree  
That came down crash and caught  
them as they fled ;  
And one was killed and one was left  
unhurt  
Except for certain fancies in his head.

And though it's all so very long ago  
He's never left the wood a single  
day ;  
I've often met him peeping through  
the leaves  
And chuckling to himself, an old  
man grey ;

## PLAYMATES

And once he started in his cracked  
old voice :

“ We’re playing I’m a merchant lost  
his way,

She’s robbers in the wood behind  
yon tree,

The minute we grow up too big to  
play ”——

## THE HOUSE ACROSS THE WAY

THE leaves looked in at the window  
Of the house across the way,  
At a man that had sinned like you  
    and me  
And all poor human clay.

He muttered : " In a gambol  
I took my soul astray,  
But to-morrow I'll drag it back from  
    danger,  
In the morning, come what may ;  
For no man knows what season  
He shall go his ghostly way."  
And his face fell down upon the  
    table,  
And where it fell it lay.

## THE HOUSE

And the wind blew under the carpet  
And it said, or it seemed to say :  
“Truly, all men must go a-ghosting  
And no man knows his day.”  
And the leaves stared in at the  
window  
Like the people at a play.

## THE BEGGAR

HE begged and shuffled on ;  
Sometimes he stopped to throw  
A bit and benison  
To sparrows in the snow,  
And clap a frozen ear  
And curse the bitter cold.  
God send the good man cheer  
And quittal hundredfold.

## BABYLON

If you could bring her glories back !  
You gentle sirs who sift the dust  
And burrow in the mould and must  
Of Babylon for bric-a-brac ;  
Who catalogue and pigeon-hole  
The faded splendours of her soul  
And put her greatness under glass—  
If you could bring her past to pass '

If you could bring her dead to life !  
The soldier lad ; the market wife ;  
Madam buying fowls from her ;  
'Tip, the butcher's bandy cur ;  
Workmen carting bricks and clay ;  
Babel passing to and fro  
On the business of a day  
Gone three thousand years ago——

## BABYLON

That you cannot ; then be done,  
Put the goblet down again,  
Let the broken arch remain,  
Leave the dead men's dust alone——

Is it nothing how she lies,  
This old mother of you all,  
You great cities proud and tall  
Towering to a hundred skies  
Round a world she never knew,  
Is it nothing, this, to you ?  
Must the ghoulish work go on  
Till her very floors are gone ?  
While there's still a brick to save  
Drive these people from her grave

The Jewish seer when he cried  
Woe to Babel's lust and pride  
Saw the foxes at her gates ;  
Once again the wild thing waits.  
Then leave her in her last decay  
A house of owls, a foxes' den ;  
The desert that till yesterday  
Hid her from the eyes of men  
In its proper time and way  
Will take her to itself again.

## THE MOOR

THE world's gone forward to its  
latest fair  
And dropt an old man done with by  
the way,  
To sit alone among the bats and  
stare  
At miles and miles and miles of  
moorland bare  
Lit only with last shreds of dying  
day.

Not all the world, not all the world's  
gone by :  
Old man, you're like to meet one  
traveller still,  
A journeyman well kenned for  
courtesy

## THE MOOR

To all that walk at odds with life  
and limb ;  
If this be he now riding up the hill  
Maybe he'll stop and take you up  
with him. . . .

“ But thou art Death ? ”      “ Of  
Heavenly Seraphim  
None else to seek thee out and bid  
thee come.”  
“ I only care that thou art come from  
Him,  
Unbody me—I'm tired—and get me  
home.”

## FEBRUARY

A FEW tossed thrushes save  
That carolled less than cried  
Against the dying rave  
And moan that never died,  
No bird sang then ; no thorn,  
No tree was green beside  
Them only never shorn—  
The few by all the winds  
And chill mutations born  
Of Winter's many minds  
Abused and whipt in vain—  
Swarth yew and ivy kinds  
And iron breeds germane.

## THE LATE, LAST ROOK

THE old gilt vane and spire receive  
The last beam eastward striking ;  
The first shy bat to peep at eve  
Has found her to his liking.  
The western heaven is dull and grey,  
The last red glow has followed day.

The late, last rook is housed and will  
With cronies lie till morrow ;  
If there's a rook loquacious still  
In dream he hunts a furrow,  
And flaps behind a spectre team,  
Or ghostly scarecrows walk his  
dream.

## THE BIRDCATCHER

WHEN fighting time is on I go  
With clap-net and decoy,  
A-fowling after goldfinches  
And other birds of joy ;

I lurk among the thickets of  
The Heart where they are bred,  
And catch the twittering beauties as  
They fly into my Head.

## THE ROYAL MAILS

For all its flowers and trailing bowers  
Its singing birds and streams,  
This valley's not the blissful spot,  
The paradise, it seems.

I don't forget a man I met  
Beneath this very tree,—  
The cooing of that cushat dove  
Brings back his face to me,—  
The merest lad, a sullen, sad,  
Unhappy soul with eyes half mad,  
Most sorrowful to see.

## THE ROYAL MAILS

I asked him who he was, and what ;  
'Twas his affair, he answered, that,  
And had no more to say ;  
'Twas all I'd feared, the tale I heard,  
When he at last gave way.

I've not forgot the look he shot  
Me through and through with then ;  
"What loathly land is this !" he  
cried,  
And cursed it for a countryside  
Where devils masque as men.

I thought at first his brain was  
burst,  
So senselessly he cried and cursed  
And spat with rage and hate ;  
He writhed to hear the glossy dove  
In song among the boughs above  
Beside its gentle mate.

## THE ROYAL MAILS

His fury passed away at last,  
And when his reason came  
He told me he was city bred,  
A page about the Court, he said,  
And coloured up with shame ;  
It made him wince to own a  
    Prince  
Of very famous fame.

“ He looked for one with speed and  
    strength  
And youth, and picked on me at  
    length  
And ordered me to stand  
Prepared to leave at break of day,  
With letters naught must long delay,  
For certain cities far away  
Across this lonely land.

## THE ROYAL MAILS

“He told me all the roads to take  
And cautioned me to go  
With ears and eyes and wits awake,  
Alert from top to toe,  
For spies and thieves wore out most  
shoes

Upon the roads that I must use,  
As he had cause to know.

“I took my cloak as morning broke  
And started down the hill,  
With Castle-bells and Fare-ye-wells  
And bugles sweet and shrill—  
Sir Woodman, though it's months ago,  
I hear that music still.

“What matters now or ever how  
I made the journey here!  
I fed on berries from the bough,  
Abundant everywhere,  
Or if it failed, that luscious meat,  
I dug up roots that wild hogs eat  
And flourished on the fare;  
At night I made a grassy bed  
And went to sleep without a dread  
And woke without a care—

## THE ROYAL MAILS

“ No matter how I managed now,  
It all went well enough,  
Until I saw this spot, I vow,  
No man was better off.

“ Last night as I came down this vale  
In wind and rain full blast,  
I turned about to hear a shout  
Ho, master, whither so fast !

“ A minute more and half a score  
Of men were at my side,  
Plain merchants all, they said they  
were,  
And camping in a thicket near,  
‘ Remain with us ! ’ they cried.

“ ‘ Remain with us, our board is spread  
With cheer the best, Ah, stay,’ they  
said,  
‘ Why go so proudly by ! ’  
And there and then my legs were lead,  
A weary man was I !

## THE ROYAL MAILS

“They stared with wonder that I  
walked  
These tangled hills and dales, and  
talked  
Of better roads at hand,  
Smooth roads without a hill to climb  
A man could walk in half the time,  
The finest in the land,  
With more,—but most of it I lost  
Or did not understand.

“‘So, come,’ they cried, ‘our tents  
are tight,  
Our fires are burning warm and  
bright!  
How shall we let you go to-night  
Without offending heaven!  
Come, leave you shall with morning  
light,  
Strong with the strength of seven!’

## THE ROYAL MAILS

“True men they seemed, for me I  
dreamed

No whit of their design,  
Their mildness would have clapped a  
hood

On sharper eyes than mine ;  
Ay, me they pressed awhile to rest,  
Persuaded me to be their guest,  
And stole the letters from my breast  
When I fell down with wine !

“It all came crowding on my mind  
With morning when I woke to find  
How blind and blind and utter blind  
And blind again I'd been ;  
Both tents and men had vanished  
then,  
Were nowhere to be seen.”

'Twas word for word a tale I'd heard  
Not once or twice before,  
Since first I made an axe ring out  
Upon the timber hereabout,  
But twenty times and more.

## THE ROYAL MAILS

For many a year we've harboured here  
A nest of thieves and worse,  
Who watch for these young Castle-  
men

At night among the gorse,  
It's hard to say if one in ten  
Gets by with life and purse.

I wonder since 'twould serve the  
Prince

To square accounts with these,—  
And many a score of footpads more  
All like as pins or peas,  
Who ply their trades in other glades  
And plunder whom they please—  
He does not rout the vermin out  
And hang them to the trees.

But this poor lad—for me I knew  
Scarce what to think or say,  
I pitied him, I pitied, too,  
Those cities far away.

## THE ROYAL MAILS

I asked him would he stay and be  
A woodman in these woods with me,  
Perhaps he did not hear,  
Perhaps the dove in song above  
Beside its mistress dear  
Was Castle-bells and Fare-ye-wells  
And hornets in his ear ;  
An old grey man in all but years,  
He pulled his cloak about his ears,  
And went I know not where.

## THE SWALLOW

THE morning that my baby came  
They found a baby swallow dead,  
And saw a something, hard to name,  
Flit moth-like over baby's bed.

My joy, my flower, my baby dear  
Sleeps on my bosom well, but Oh!  
If in the Autumn of the year  
When swallows gather round and  
go——

## A WOOD SONG

Now one and all, you Roses,  
Wake up, you lie too long !  
This very morning closes  
The Nightingale his song ;

Each from its olive chamber  
His babies every one  
This very morning clamber  
Into the shining sun.

You Slug-a-beds and Simples,  
Why will you so delay !  
Dears, doff your olive wimples,  
And listen while you may.

REASON has moons, but moons not  
hers,  
Lie mirror'd on her sea,  
Confounding her astronomers,  
But, O ! delighting me.

. . . .

BABYLON—where I go dreaming  
When I weary of to-day,  
Weary of a world grown grey.

// GOD loves an idle rainbow,  
No less than labouring seas.

## THE BRIDE

THE book was dull, its pictures  
As leaden as its lore,  
But one glad, happy picture  
Made up for all and more ;  
'Twas that of you, sweet peasant,  
Beside your grannie's door—  
I never stopped so startled  
Inside a book before.

Just so had I sat spell-bound,  
Quite still with staring eyes,  
If some great shiny hoopoe  
Or moth of song-bird size  
Had drifted to my window  
And trailed its fineries—  
Just so had I been startled,  
Spelled with the same surprise.

## THE BRIDE

It pictured you when springtime  
In part had given place  
But not surrendered wholly  
To summer in your face ;  
When still your slender body  
Was all a childish grace  
Though woman's richest glories  
Were building there apace.

'Twas blissful so to see you,  
Yet not without a sigh  
I dwelt upon the people  
Who saw you not as I,  
But in your living sweetness,  
Beneath your native sky ;  
Ah, bliss to be the people  
When you went tripping by !

## THE BRIDE

I sat there, thinking, wondering,  
About your life and home,  
The happy days behind you,  
The happy days to come,  
Your grannie in her corner,  
Upstairs the little room  
Where you wake up each morning  
To dream all day—of Whom?

That ring upon your finger,  
Who gave you that to wear?  
What blushing smith or farm lad  
Came stammering at your ear  
A million-time-told story  
No maid but burns to hear,  
And went about his labours  
Delighting in his dear!

## THE BRIDE

I thought of you sweet lovers,  
The things you say and do,  
The pouts and tears and partings  
And swearings to be true,  
The kissings in the barley—  
You brazens, both of you !  
I nearly burst out crying  
With thinking of you two.

It put me in a frenzy  
Of pleasure nearly pain,  
A host of blurry faces  
'Gan shaping in my brain,  
I shut my eyes to see them  
Come forward clear and plain  
I saw them come full flower,  
And blur and fade again.

## THE BRIDE

One moment so I saw them,  
One sovereign moment so,  
A host of girlish faces  
All happy and aglow  
With Life and Love it dealt them  
Before it laid them low,  
A hundred years, a thousand,  
Ten thousand years ago.

One moment so I saw them  
Come back with time full tide,  
The host of girls, your grannies,  
Who lived and loved and died  
To give your mouth its beauty,  
Your soul its gentle pride,  
Who wrestled with the ages  
To give the world a bride.

## AFTER

“How fared you when you mortal  
were ?

What did you see on my peopled  
star ? ”

“Oh well enough,” I answered her,  
“It went for me where mortals  
are !

“I saw blue flowers and the merlin’s  
flight

And the rime on the wintry tree,  
Blue doves I saw and summer light  
On the wings of the cinnamon  
bee.”

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